

The following claims are presented for examination:

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
receiving a proposed password from a user;  
performing an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from the proposed password by using a search engine tool; and  
rejecting the proposed password based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both **a keyword from the query ~~the search string~~** and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords, **wherein:**
  - i. the proposed password is rejected when the number of the retrieved web pages exceeds a threshold, and**
  - ii. the threshold is greater than one.**
2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be qualitatively correlated with the user.
3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be quantitatively correlated with the user.
4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be correlated with the proposed hint in a particular relation.
5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the rule concerns a relation from the group consisting essentially of: self, family member, co-author, teammate, colleague, neighbor, community member or household member.
6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be obtained from the proposed hint.
7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is an identifying number.
8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to the user.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number is a top N most commonly used identifying number.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a top N commercial entity.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies the user.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of a telephone number.

13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of an address.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of social security number.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is a word.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, wherein the rule evaluates a correlation between the word and the user.

17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the search engine is a meta search engine.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the search engine employs local proximity techniques.

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the search engine employs a number classification.

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21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:  
a memory; and  
at least one processor, coupled to the memory, operative to:  
receive a proposed password from a user;  
perform an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from the proposed password, by using a search engine tool; and

reject the proposed password based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both **a keyword from the query** ~~the search string~~ and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords, **wherein the proposed password is rejected when the number of the retrieved web pages exceeds a threshold, and wherein the threshold is greater than one.**

22. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be correlated with the user.

23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be correlated with the proposed hint in a particular relation.

24. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be obtained from the proposed hint.

25. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the proposed password is an identifying number.

26. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 25, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to the user.

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27. (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture for evaluating a password proposed by a user, comprising a machine readable medium containing one or more programs which when executed implement the steps of:

receive the proposed password from the user; and  
performing an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from the proposed password,-by using a search engine tool; and  
rejecting the proposed password based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both **a keyword from the query** ~~the search string~~ and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords, **wherein the proposed password is rejected when the number of the retrieved web pages exceeds a threshold, and wherein the threshold is greater than one.**